

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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RECORD NUMBER OF BIPARTISAN LAWMAKERS INTRODUCE BILL TO PROTECT ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Today, Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and House Resources Committee introduced the Morris K. Udall Wilderness Act of 2003 with 128 bipartisan cosponsors – the highest number of original cosponsors ever. The Act will designate nearly 1.6 million acres – the so-called 1002 Area – of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness, permanently protecting the area from development.

“It is clear that the Arctic Refuge is now in the same category as Yellowstone or Yosemite --that there are places so special, so unique, and so unspoiled in our natural world that they should be set aside for future generations as national treasures and protected against energy development,” said Markey.

The Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge stretches from the Beaufort Sea to the Brooks Range and serves as a crucial breeding and migratory habitat for more than 200 species, including polar bears, caribou and more than 160 bird species. The area is also a critical calving ground for the 130,000 caribou of the Porcupine herd. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Coastal Plain ecosystem is “unique compared to the rest of northern Alaska.”

“Scientists call the Coastal Plain the ‘biological heart’ of the Refuge, and it deserves the highest level of federal protection. When you drill in the heart, every other part of the biological system suffers,” concluded Markey, “This Valentine’s Day, the oil industry is in a state of lobbying frenzy to give Cupid a bad name. It wants to pierce the heart of the Arctic Refuge with oil wells and drill bits, all the while calling this an act of environmental friendliness. The industry loves the Refuge so much that it wants to brand it with scars for a lifetime.”

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